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ABSTRACT

Research studies on group versus individual bystander responses either have involved nonviolent emergencies or laboratory simulations. To investigate group versus individual bystander response to a violent assualt in a natural setting, 80 male college students (from an original pool of 393 white, male students) were observed either individually or in small (3 to 5 person) groups, as they witnessed an apparent (simulated) rape. Witness intervention modes (direct, indirect, no intervention) were coded by three hidden observers and a campus security guard placed on an alternate route from the rape scene. An analysis of the results showed that 85% of the subjects in the group condition intervened, compared to 65% of individual bystanders. Seventy percent of the groups intervened directly, while 50% of the individuals did so. The findings suggest that group processes which inhibit group response in one set of circumstances (as indicated by Latane's 1970 laboratory research) can enhance group response in another set. The findings also highlight the importance of conducting such experiments in natural settings, despite the numerous methodological problems that must be overcome. (BL)

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Group vs. Individual Bystander Response to a Violent Assault: A Field Experiment

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Abstract

The present study investigated the dynamics of group vs. individual bystander intervention to a violent assault. It was proposed that the simulation of violent emergencies in realistic natural settings evokes group processes which enhance group bystander intervention to a higher level than that of individual bystanders, in contrast to most contemporary laboratory findings. The present study also investigated the dynamics of direct vs. indirect (calling an authority) intervention. It was proposed that groups, offering more physical safety to their members, would be more apt to intervene indirectly. Male college students who were walking alone or in the presence of other males witnessed a simulated rape on campus. Their behavior -- no intervention, direct intervention, or indirect intervention was monitored. The results fully supported the first hypothesis: groups intervened more than did individuals. The results particularly supported the second hypothesis: groups showed more direct help than did individuals, but even individuals showed more direct than indirect help. The implications of these and other findings are discussed.

Group vs. Individual Bystander Response

to a Violent Assault: A Field Experiment

The major impetus for the present study came from our students. There had been a rash of rapes on the campus, and we were plied with questions about what psychologists can contribute to combat this crime. We pointed out the emotional trauma experienced by rape victims (Burgess & Holmstrom, 1974), the callous, predatory, essentially nonsexual, aspects of rape (e.g., Brack & Connor, 1975; Grothe, Burgess & Holmstrom, 1977), its frequent erroneous perception as a "lovers' quarrel" (e.g., Shotland & Straw, 1976), the prevalence of speculations on whether or not rapes are likely to increase in the future (e.g., Lesse, 1979), and even some empirical findings on how rape victims can attract help (e.g., Shotland & Stebbins, 1980). Despite our comments, we noticed that a certain pessimistic tone continued to fuel many of the student's questions. Many wondered about the extent to which a potential rape victim can even count on help from others. One of the student's specific concerns -- which became the basis of the present research -- was whether there really is "safety in numbers" for a victim, i.e., a greater liklihood that help will emerge from a group of bystanders than from a sole bystander. Our review of the literature suggested that the issue was still an empirical question.

The initial, and most widely cited, research into the above question was conducted by Latané and his colleagues (Latané & Darley, 1970). Latané's research emerged in response to the callous murder of Kitty Genovese of Kew Garden, New York, in the presence of 38 neighbors. In attempting to understand the lack of bystander intervention in that case, Latané attempted to replicate in the laboratory the social-psychological environment of the Genovese murder: the "victim" was not clearly visible to "bystanders," the "bystanders" often could not see or communicate with each other, and situational ambiguity was maintained. The researchers found there was considerably less helping behavior from subjects in the "group" condition (presence of other bystanders) than in the "individual" condition (sole bystander). The inhibition of group response was attributed to such factors as social influence (the belief that help is not required because it is assumed that nobody else is helping), evaluation apprehension (the fear of disapproval for behaving inappropriately), and diffusion of responsibility (the dilution across the group of personal obligation to help) (Latané & Darley, 1970; see also Schwartz & Gottlieb, 1978, 1980). The general conclusion of Latané and his colleagues was that there was no safety in numbers and that even a sole bystander was more likely to provide help than a group of bystanders.

It seemed to us, however, that there are other situations in which the same processes of social influence and evaluation apprehension may enhance group helping behavior and inhibit individual helping behavior. First of all, a bystander's defining of a situation as an emergency is an important precursor of intervention (Latané & Darley, 1970; Shotland & Huston, 1979). A group member who can see and communicate with the other bystanders can use their reactions to verify that the situation is indeed an emergency requiring help; an individual bystander, lacking this avenue for social comparison, might be more prone to define the situation as one not requiring help (cf. Darley, Teger & Lewis, 1973; Piliavin Piliavin & Rodin, 1975). Secondly, physical costs of intervention can inhibit action (Piliavin et al, 1975; Shotland & Stebbins, 1980). Physical costs are likely to be perceived as greater by a sole bystander who lacks a physical safety net provided by other bystanders (see Piliavin et al, 1975). Thirdly, group members are more likely than individual bystanders to conclude that lack of intervention may generate social disapproval (Schwartz, 1973). This awareness would make it more likely that at least one bystander in a group will adhere to the norm of social responsibility, take action, and thus serve as a model for others (Piliavin et al, 1975; Schwartz, 1973; Schwartz & Gottlieb, 1980). Finally, as far as the inhibiting

effect of diffusion of responsibility is concerned, there is evidence that it disappears when the victim's plight is clearly visible in natural settings (Piliavin et al, 1975).

Our literature review not only convinced us that the issue of group vs. individual response was still unsettled, but it also led us to two additional observations. First, despite the acknowledged influence of the Genovese case -- a terrifying and violent emergency -- most studies on bystander intervention have generally involved nonviolent emergencies such as smoke from air vents (Latané & Darley, 1968), car breakdowns (e.g., Gruder, Romer & Korth, 1978), falling bookcases (e.g., Latané & Rodin, 1969), sick or drunk victims (e.g., Piliavin, Rodin & Piliavin, 1969), nonviolent theft (e.g., Moriarty, 1975), or grocery bags breaking (e.g., Wispe & Freshley, 1971). Very few studies have carefully simulated violent emergencies such as robberies or assaults (e.g., Schwartz & Gottlieb, 1976, 1980; Shotland & Stebbins, 1980; Shotland & Straw, 1976). However, Shotland and his colleagues did not systematically manipulate group vs. individual response. Schwartz and Gottlieb did, but their studies used a Latané-type of methodology insofar as: (a) the alleged crimes of assault or robbery occurred in a room other than that in which the subject was seated; (b) the "group" condition consisted of only two individuals; and (c) subjects were prevented

from seeing or hearing the other bystander.

Our second observation was that research studies on bystander intervention have tended to be conducted in a laboratory setting. Our students' concerns made us more receptive to colleagues (e.g., Elms, 1975; Proshansky, 1976; Shipee, 1979) who seriously question psychologists' overreliance on laboratory research. They and others point out problems with laboratory research including generalizability, "relevance," demand characteristics, and the subject's lack of familiarity with an artificial environment. We believe that a realistic simulation of a violent emergency in a natural setting is important in augmenting knowledge gained from laboratory research. We also believe that given Americans' rapidly increasing anxiety about violent crime (Time, 1981), this type of study can help move social-psychological research still closer to a frame of "relevance." Finally, it seemed to us that a retreat from natural settings when conducting research on violent emergencies can lead to questionable findings, or to questionable interpretations of such findings; as when feigned assaults in a psychodrama session led to the conclusion that male subjects did not help a woman attacked by another male ". . . because they were deriving some kind of vicarious sexual and/or hostile gratification from seeing a man injure a woman" (Borofsky, Stollack & Messe, 1971, p. 317).

We thus concluded that a study meeting all the following criteria was warranted: (a) group vs. individual response is a controlled independent variable; (b) the manipulated incident is a violent assault; (c) the assault occurs clearly in front of subjects; (d) subjects can see and communicate with each other; (e) subjects are in a familiar natural setting.

In the present study an apparent rape of a woman by a man was clearly witnessed in a natural setting by male bystanders who were either alone or were in the presence of other male bystanders. In line with our earlier comments about the potential facilitative effects of groups, our major hypothesis was that in this case there would be more intervention in the presence of other bystanders than by bystanders alone. A secondary aspect of this study dealt with direct vs. indirect intervention. The research in this area (Piliavin et al, 1975; Shotland & Stebbins, 1980, Shotland & Straw, 1976), suggests that due to possible physical costs of direct intervention, a bystander may choose a less efficient but safer response of reporting the incident to an expert or authority, i.e., "indirect" help. In line with our earlier comments about the potentially greater physical safety in groups, we hypothesized that sole bystanders would be more likely to provide indirect help than would group bystanders, while group bystanders would be more likely to provide direct help

than would individual bystanders.

Method

Subjects

The original pool of subjects consisted of 393 white male San Diego State University students who were observed on their way to two prechosen experimental areas. The final analysis involved observations on 80 of the subjects. (See Procedure.)

Experimental Areas

The two secluded but well-lit areas selected for staging the rape were chosen by campus police because they had been the scenes of previous rape assaults. The two areas had identical topographical dimensions. Figure 1 is a schematic representation of both areas. The path was used by all subjects on their way to their destination, the parking lot. The experiment proper, began once the subjects reached the vantage point which was about 20-30 feet from the staged rape scene. From the vantage point on, the parking lot could be reached by three different routes, each of which was out of view from the others. These three routes provided subjects with three behavioral alternatives once they had witnessed the rape scene (see Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 about here

Procedure

Figure 1 shows four observers: Observer 1 was concealed in a van, Observers 2 and 3 were concealed in the surrounding shrubbery, and Observer 4 was a campus security officer placed on an alternate route to the parking lot ostensibly writing out parking tickets. The officer was in full view from the vantage point, but far enough from the rape scene to presumably not be able to see or hear the incident. All observations were coordinated with and supervised by the campus police, and all observers were furnished with binoculars and walkie-talkies.

Subjects were selected upon their arrival at the vantage point under one of two conditions: "individual," when the males arrived along, or "group," when the number of viewing males was at least three but did not exceed five. In order to reduce potential experimental contamination, special care was taken to select non-intact groups, i.e., males who simply happened to walk close to one another on their way to the parking lot.

Just before the subjects arrived at the vantage point, two confederates -- a white male and female -- were given a signal by a third observer to start the simulated assault. The female confederate was a drama major with previous acting experience, of average size, who wore Levis, a white blouse, and a light-colored sweater.

The male confederate had a medium build, was about 6 feet tall, weighed about 170 pounds, and wore Levis and a white T-shirt. Upon the signal, the female appeared walking casually with her back to the subject(s). The male confederate suddenly appeared from the bushes and grabbed her roughly with one hand over her mouth and the other around her waist. Both appeared to be struggling, and the victim's books would fall and scatter to the ground. One muffled scream was followed by one clear scream, then another muffled scream, and a final yell: "Help! Help! Please help me! You bastard! Rape! Rape!" All this would happen within a 15-20 second period, followed by the male dragging her away while she kept struggling and protesting "No! No!"

Each experimental trial involved one uninterrupted observation of the rape scene by a subject from the vantage point for a period of up to 60 seconds. The vantage point, of course, allowed a full view of the attempted rape. Subjects were credited with direct intervention if they approached within 10 feet of the rape scene with the observed intention of helping (assumed from what they were saying and/or their body language); indirect intervention if they chose the route where the policeman was stationed and told him what they saw; and no intervention if they chose to proceed via the third route (see Figure 1). In the group-condition, the first subject who

clearly chose one of the three behavioral alternatives was considered the representative of that group. (While theoretically the first subject need not have been representative of the others' behavior, in fact he turned out to be the representative in all cases.) Trials were run between 7:00-10:00 p.m. on alternate nights.

Results and Discussion

The frequencies for intervention and nonintervention are listed in Table 1. The data in this resultant 2 x 2 contingency table yielded a $\chi^2 = 4.26$, $p < .05$. Since the chi-square tests with one degree of freedom are greatly dependent on sample size, Goodman's Measure of Association (Marascuilo & McSweeney, 1977, p. 207) which is relatively independent of sample size, was employed with similar significant results.

Insert Table 1 about here

Before discussing the results and their implications, a brief reminder seems in order. Clearly, field studies on sensitive and complex topics such as violent emergencies involve a myriad of logistical problems. We tried to meet them head-on, with the help of the campus police and the university administration. The logistical problems, however, were immense. The walkie-talkies, vans, binoculars, and police officers were only the beginning. For example, in

order to observe the 393 subjects in the study, we must have seen at least five times as many subjects as were passing by, but who in one way or another did not fit our criteria for individual or group bystanders. Natural-setting logistics also prevented us from manipulating male, female, and mixed-sex groups of bystanders as independent variables. That task would have been overwhelming, so we opted for the methodological rigor of single-sex bystanders. Also frustrating was the fact that geographical, time, and even police-imposed limitations prevented us from interviewing the non-helpers. Methodologically, the dependent measure in this field study also requires a comment. Since the subjects racing down the "direct" route were stopped immediately prior to reaching the attacker and victim, we cannot know for sure their precise response, e.g., a severe blow to the "rapist," or perhaps a verbal reprimand. Nevertheless, our consensual observations coupled with the debriefing not only established the credibility of our manipulations, at least with the helpers (100% of intervening subjects -- direct and indirect -- believed that the situation was real), but also completely convinced us that the subjects in the direct-intervention route intended to actively intervene.

Overall, the results, as shown in Table 1, can be construed as rendering an optimistic picture in that the number of helpers to

the rape victim exceeded that of non-helpers 75% to 25%. This impressive finding was no doubt due partially to the fact that the "natural" situation was so "clear" that subjects would have found it difficult to define the situation as anything other than what it was. The debriefing interviews confirmed that intervening subjects found the incident so clear and obvious that some sort of intervention was the only reasonable response. Similarly, in their study of bystander intervention to a rape, Shotland and Stebbins (1980) found that ". . . a woman is more likely to get help if she can be seen for approximately three seconds during the beginning of the attack and is verbally protesting (68%) than if she is out of bystanders' sight and is only protesting and pleading verbally (13%)" (p. 519). We speculate that the non-helpers did not define the situation as either "real" or as an "emergency," or did define the situation as such but were afraid to intervene (physical cost factor).

Consistent with Shotland and Stebbins' thoughts, the impressive level of helping behavior here, as in their study, may have also been partially due to the fact that the subjects were males, and were younger and in better physical shape than other male populations. Still another possible contributing factor may have been that college students seem to have a greater social-political aware-

ness about rape, i.e., that the motivation for rape is not sex but power and intimidation, and that women do not initiate rape attacks and therefore should not be held responsible (cf. Field, 1978). Such thinking probably augmented helping behavior by encouraging empathy for the victim (Coke, Batson, & McDavis, 1978) and by increasing the legitimacy of the victim's plight and request for help (Cowan & Inskeep, 1978; Gruder, Romer, & Korth, 1978; Piliavin et al, 1969, 1975).

While the nature of the sample may have contributed to these results, it must be reiterated that unlike many other studies (laboratory or field) in psychology, there were compelling reasons in this case to use college students as subjects. Our concerns were with the dynamics of intervention in a natural setting. A number of rapes of women students had been occurring on the San Diego State campus; thus our choice of that campus as an experimental setting was "natural," and the use of San Diego State University students as subjects was also "natural." In any event, the results seem to contradict the frequent charges of callousness, indifference or vicarious enjoyment among bystanders witnessing a rape, or the charge that a male rendering help to a rape victim is "anti-normative" (Bauermeister, 1977).

The data in Table 1 also confirm the major hypothesis of this

study, that when a violent emergency occurs in a natural setting, an interacting group of bystanders intervenes more than does an individual bystander. In the present study, 85% of subjects in the group condition (n = 34) intervened, as compared to 65% of individual bystanders (n = 26), a statistically significant difference. Post-trial discussions with intervening subjects in the group condition corroborated the facilitative impact of group processes. Repeatedly, subjects talked about looking at the attack with shock, looking at other bystanders for "verification," and then simply acting by either consciously following the example of another bystander(s) or just being swept up by an emotionally charged "group force." Interestingly, the discussions with subjects in the group condition also indicated that fear of social disapproval was an important incentive. Many subjects alluded to the fact that non-action would have been perceived as callousness or cowardice by the other bystanders. The fact that 15% of the group subjects did not intervene may be due to the possibility that a non-reaction from other bystanders "confirmed" to each bystander that the situation was not really an emergency that required help, or that it was somehow "o.k." not to act. (See Darley et al, 1973; Latané and Darley, 1970.)

Finally, the data show that there was little indirect inter-

vention, even, contrary to expectations, in the "individual" condition. All intervening subjects told us that they saw the police officer from the vantage point. Still, 60% of all subjects intervened directly. Of the total number of intervening subjects, 80% intervened directly. These findings are in striking contrast to those of Shotland and Stebbins (1980), where 17% of all male subjects intervened directly, and only 28% of male helpers intervened directly (the figures for female subjects were even lower). There are at least two possible explanations for this discrepancy. One is suggested by Shotland and Stebbins themselves. They note that indirect intervention is more likely to occur when the setting prevents the criminal from making a fast exit (e.g., in a room, forcing a confrontation, as occurred in their study) as opposed to an open space which allows the criminal to retreat (as in this study). Another possible explanation is that subjects feel more secure and self-confident in a familiar natural setting. In a laboratory setting, the feeling of ambiguity, uncertainty as to "proper" behavior, and dependence on authority figures (e.g., the experimenter) may inhibit the forceful autonomous behavior called for by direct help. In the present study, the subjects themselves offered some compelling reasons for their behavior. Most of the intervening subjects felt that the incident was so blatantly outrageous that only a

direct immediate "gut" response was in order. This was the general tenor of responses to the query as to why they did not summon the police officer. Another, though less frequent, response was that there was simply not enough time to summon the officer.

The data in Table 1 also reveal that the greater helping response shown by groups was due solely to the fact that they were more willing to provide direct help than were individuals: 70% of groups intervened directly, while "only" 50% of individuals did so. These findings are consistent with our earlier hypothesis, but, no doubt due to a small sample size, the differences were not statistically significant.

All in all, the results of the present study have assuaged some of the pessimism of our students. Given a natural setting and a clear plight of the victim, not only is a rape victim likely to get help, but there is indeed "safety in numbers" for her when group members can interact with each other. Future research will have to determine the extent to which these findings hold with female bystanders. Still, the present study has shown that group processes which inhibit group response in one set of circumstances (e.g., Latané research) can enhance group response in another set (e.g., present research). We hope that the present findings will temper attempts to render global explanations, as has often been done since

the Genovese tragedy, on the dynamics of group vs. individual bystander intervention in violent emergencies.

Finally, the logistical difficulties we faced in carrying out this research made us emphathize with Wegner and Schaefer (1978). Those researchers, after unsuccessfully attempting to simulate a violent emergency in a natural setting, returned to a "nonthreatening laboratory situation" (p. 149). On the other hand, the present findings suggest to us that a fruitful avenue for future research into violent emergencies is the inclusion of studies in natural settings, despite the inherent problems of logistics and methodology that mark such an approach.

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Table 1

Frequency of Intervention and Nonintervention

by Groups and Individuals

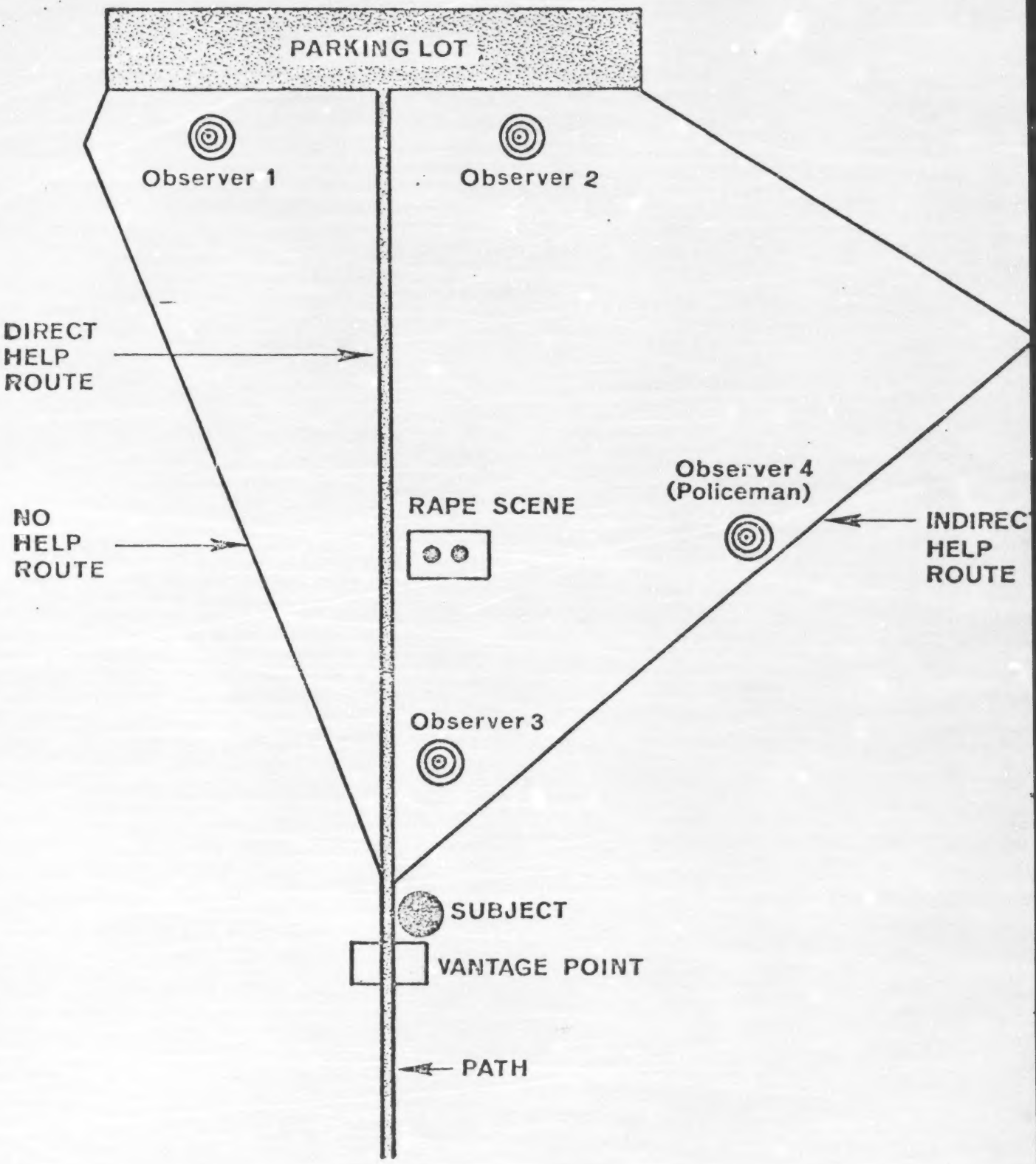
		Help	No Help
Bystanders	Group	34*	6
	Individual	26**	14

*Direct = 28, Indirect = 6

**Direct = 20, Indirect = 6

Figure Caption

Figure 1. A schematic representation of the experimental setting.


PARKING LOT
Observer 1
Observer 2
DIRECT
HELP
ROUTE
NO
HELP
ROUTE
RAPE SCENE
Observer 4
(Policeman)
INDIREC
HELP
ROUTE
Observer 3
SUBJECT
VANTAGE POINT
PATH